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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 002685

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: CIVIL SOCIETY SUGGESTS CHANGES TO ASSOCIATIONS
LAW; ROADBLOCKS TO PASSAGE REMAIN

REF: A. AMMAN 2633

[1](#)B. AMMAN 2359

[1](#)C. AMMAN 2300

[1](#)D. AMMAN 2062

[1](#)E. AMMAN 1465

[1](#)F. AMMAN 2585

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Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Representatives of Jordan's civil society are negotiating with the government on amendments to the Law on Associations (Refs A-E). Possible obstacles include tribal conservatives and the security services seeking to protect their equities, and civil society confronting its own internal divisions. There is a risk that the improvements could be watered down in the process, but strong governmental backing will likely lead to passage in the parliament. The activists do have a trump card in the form of implicit royal backing for their cause. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Following the government's decision to reconsider the Law on Associations (Ref A), the civil society figures charged with suggesting amendments presented Minister of Social Development Hala Lattouf with their thoughts on September 14. The substance of the amendments is still under negotiation, both within civil society and between the activists and the government. Several civil society leaders involved in the negotiations told poloff that their primary goal is to ameliorate the government's statutory ability to intervene in NGOs' internal workings, including on the question of funding received from abroad.

Strategy For Passage Unclear

[1](#)3. (C) Prime Minister Dahabi's September 8 meeting with civil society created a road map for government consideration of amendments, but there are no clear understandings between the government and NGOs about what the rest of the process will look like. Activists are trying to stay close to the process, out of a keen suspicion, born of experience with the previous draft (Refs B-E), that social and security conservatives within the government and parliament will attempt to obstruct the amendment process.

[1](#)4. (C) Timing will be crucial. Contacts suggest that the PM is eager to introduce amendments early in the upcoming parliamentary session, but fear that the PM will lose interest if a workable alternative is not produced in due course. Some are concerned that tribal conservatives will attempt to delay consideration in the hopes that the amendment push will fade. Comment: Unlike the recently-concluded extraordinary session, "regular" sessions of parliament do not have a fixed agenda, making an early push in parliament (while MPs are more focused) imperative.

End comment. The concern is not unfounded: a front page article in the September 16 edition of opposition daily Al-Dustour cites an unnamed "ministry source" as saying that the amendments will not be presented to parliament before the end of the year.

Potential Roadblocks

15. (C) Activists we met with see Interior Minister Eid Al-Fayez and General Intelligence Department (GID) chief LtG Mohammed Dahabi as obstacles to reform within the government.

Activists acknowledge that there is currently no plan to either lobby the security chiefs or meet their concerns halfway. Comment: Few in civil society have contacts in MOI or GID that could be used to start a productive conversation. End comment.

16. (C) Parliament is yet another hurdle. Civil society will have to overcome its earlier intemperate performance, when activists publicly upbraided MPs, leaving them offended and angry. Even so, NGO leaders are already planning to lobby key figures in parliament, with the expectation that the PM will throw his weight behind the amendments. Three MPs were cited by contacts as key potential roadblocks. Abdulkarim Al-Dughmi and Abdulrauf Rawabdeh are long-serving conservative MPs who typically advance the arguments of the security services. Rawabdeh in particular was the MP who amended the previous version to shift permission for foreign funding to the cabinet level, using "sovereignty of the state" arguments -- something he could easily do again. Parliament speaker Abdulhadi Al-Majali is considered by some as a potential obstacle, by others as an ally. Despite his conservatism, Majali usually follows the lead of the government and will likely support the amendments once the

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GOJ blesses them. As the leader of a newly created political party (Ref F) which holds around sixty seats in the parliament, Majali will bring a block of votes along with him, perhaps enough to pass the amendments outright.

Hole Card: The King's Influence

17. (C) Activists we spoke to were all operating under the assumption that King Abdullah had a direct role in forcing the government to reconsider the law (Ref A). While some still advocate pushing for a royal veto, to send a stronger signal, the more pragmatic members of the group heard PM Dahabi loud and clear when he said that a veto was politically impossible. In the end, most activists we spoke with are satisfied that the King was responsive to their concerns. Several of our contacts added that the King has a broader vision for civil society -- one that it currently lacks the capacity to fulfill. "NGOs are trying to keep up with the royal family, but they cannot," says Jawad Qusous of UK NGO Questscope. "The King is waiting. We have to help him. The problem is that we have the will, but not the ability."

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